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ABSTRACT

Is sociology a legitimate and worthwhile course of study at the secondary level? Sociology differs from other disciplines in its conceptual and abstract nature. Sociology is about organizations, systems, structures, processes, and relationships. It studies power, conflict, roles, and values. Grasping these abstractions is most difficult at the introductory level. Sociology also lacks unity of perspective. This is exciting for sociologists, but confusing for students. Sociologists for the most part have leaned toward improving social conditions and toward getting involved in social issues and reform movements. They are inclined to exhibit a tolerance for the nonconformists of society. Much of sociological instruction is politicized, and a liberalizing effect has been documented among students taking introductory sociology. Given these problems, there are multiple alternatives. Sociology could be ignored as a legitimate area of study, or it could be treated as a scientific discipline, but neither of these approaches is very realistic. Sociology must become relevant to students. Schools, through sociological training, can teach research and data analysis skills, can help students think critically about the social world and their place within it, and can help assist in the development of problem-solving skills at both personal and organizational levels. Sociology does have a place in the curriculum. A 24-item bibliography is included. (JB)

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TRENDS AND PROBLEMS IN SOCIOLOGY:

AS A DISCIPLINE AND AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT

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TRENDS AND PROBLEMS IN SOCIOLOGY:

AS A DISCIPLINE AND AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT1.

> People who like to avoid shocking discoveries, who prefer to believe that society is just what they were taught in Sunday School, who like the safety of the rules...should stay away from Sociology.
>
> Peter Berger

Sociology is the study of social life and the social causes and consequences of human behavior (Eshleman 1988, p. 6). It focuses both upon 1) recurring relationships among people and 2) social structures and organizations that cannot be explained by the personal characteristics of the people involved. In attempting to understand social behavior, an emphasis is placed on creating an awareness of the relationship between an individual and the larger society: a type of creative thinking described by C Wright Mills as the sociological imagination (Mills 1959).

This sounds simple enough, threatening to no one and certainly noncontroversial. Who is not interested in knowing about social life, interpersonal relationships and society? Who is not interested in putting their imagination to work in comprehending the links between their immediate, personal social settings and the remote, impersonal world in which they exist? Who is not interested in understanding how the human condition can be improved and the world made a better place? And if sociology focuses on these things, why is this discipline not in the curriculum of every school and required of every student in the country as exists for

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1. The helpful comments and suggestions of Michael Wise are greatly appreciated.

english, math, and history? Why are sociologists not found in every conceivable organization including schools and educational institutions? Why does not funding for social research exceed that of the Department of Defense? To address issues such as these, this paper will take a brief look at some trends, problems and controversies in sociology as a discipline and its relevance to education, particularly in the precollege setting.

TRENDS AND PROBLEMS CONFRONTING SOCIOLOGY

Thirty years ago, Talcott Parsons, regarded at that time as the preeminent sociological theorist, wrote a paper for discussion at the general session of the American Sociological Association annual meeting on "Some Problems Confronting Sociology as a Profession" (Parsons 1959). The central concerns (problems) addressed in the paper included: 1) the extent to which the canons of scientific adequacy and objectivity have come to be established as the working code of the profession; 2)the clarity of the differentiation from and relation to neighboring scientific disciplines; 3) the differentiation of sociology as a science from sociological "practice"; and 4) the differentiation of sociology as a scientific discipline from the non-scientific aspects of the general culture such as philosophy, religion, literature and the arts.

Parsons went on to state that in contrast to a predominantly applied profession like medicine, sociology is universally conceived as a scientific discipline which is primarily

dedicated to the advancement and transmission of empirical knowledge in its field and secondarily to the communication of such knowledge to non-members and its utilization in practical affairs (p. 547).

To Parsons, sociology had become a distinct and unique discipline. He saw great strides in the disciplines institutionalization, with sociology, for the first time, being recognized as one of the regular disciplines in every major American university. He saw sociology producing research results that were of improved quality and derived from more superior methods. These changes, he believed, had led to a notable increase in status from being the least respectable social science discipline to one of high respectability, although the most controversial.

Notably absent in his writing was any concern or mention of sociology as a discipline becoming institutionalized beyond university settings such as at the secondary school level or any mention of conflict, fragmentation, or internal differentiation within the discipline. Notably absent was any mention of stagnation or contraction of the resource base for the discipline, the oversupply of trained sociologists relative to demand, or the major development of an applied, clinical and social engineering focus as a primary focus within and outside of academia.

Clearly, much as transpired in the 30 years since the Parsons statement and will continue to transpire in the future (note: Giddens 1987). The 1960s and 1970s saw increased attacks within the discipline on the functionalist emphasis on stability,

coherence and integration of the components parts of society. Increased attacks were launched against sociological positivism with its morally neutral pretensions and empiricism. Ethnomethodologists argued that the widely accepted notion of "social facts" as portrayed by Durkheim and contemporary functionalists are not a given but are continuously generated and reproduced through personal interaction. Neo-Marxists argued that positive social science, far from being an objective set of procedures developed to understand the social world, is part of the ideological complex of capitalist or postindustrial societies. Renewed debates on biological determinism called for shifts from the social to the organismic or genetic level as the basic source of determination of social behavior.

Concurrently with these attacks and changes came the proliferation of many new and specialized subfields of interest within the discipline: the sociology of women and gender, of education, of medicine and health care, of law, of sexual behavior, of sport and leisure, of age stratification, of the arts, of domestic violence, of peace studies, of Black, Chicano, and Jewish studies, and, in short, of any special interest group within society. Each demanded its place in the curriculum and as special organizations within the profession.

And while pressing social problems such as crime, mental health, poverty, unemployment, school drop-outs, unwed parenthood, drugs, economic instability, and the like remained persistent over these decades, considerable hostility toward sociology as a legitimate discipline existed among many "hard scientists", many

government officials, funding agencies, and others. The general view and belief was of sociology and the study of human behavior as basically unscientific, of little use or value, and as trivial, unimportant and presenting the obvious.

Were these critics and skeptics correct? Is 1980s sociology in the doldrums, as Collins asks (1986)? Were changes and conflicts within the profession itself self defeating? To a great extent, perhaps they were. Perhaps the discipline of sociology, the areas it investigated and the methods it used were disruptive, cause for concern and foremost, different. Perhaps an exposure of selected areas in which sociology is different is necessary to understand the consideration of sociology as a legitimate school subject.

SOCIOLOGY AS DIFFERENT

James Dowd, in a recent article on the misevaluation of teaching effectiveness in sociology, claims that sociology is different (Dowd 1988). Permit me to paraphrase and elaborate on several of his points and relate them to sociology as a school subject.

1. What Sociology is and What Sociologists do

First, the difference begins with what sociology is and what sociologists do. Whereas some disciplines can create bombs that explode, a cure for some fatal disease, the know how to repair an automobile, or a knowledge of a language foreign to us, what does sociology create or produce? As noted, Parsons believed the primary task was the advancement and transmission of knowledge.

Thus, except for knowledge (which in itself is often suspect), one argument is that sociology produces nothing. What new inventions are attributable to sociology? What unique skills do sociologists impart that are not found in other disciplines? What special services, such as those provided by social workers, doctors, or custodians, do sociologists provide for persons or communities?

This perspective suggests that sociology has no inherent legitimacy comparable to that bestowed upon math, english, biology, or physics. Consider if you will, how disturbed parents would become if the announcement were made that their local school was going to drop reading, writing, and arithmetic from the elementary school curriculum and english, history, and chemistry from the secondary school curriculum. Contrast this with their reaction to dropping sociology, assuming it exists in the first place. If sociology were dropped, need I warn you to prepare for a recall of the school board members, a demand for the resignation of the school superintendent and principal, or a protest gathering at the school building site? I rest my case.

2. Sociology's Conceptual and Abstract Nature

Second, sociology is different in it's conceptual and abstract nature. We can count persons, take pictures of birds, hold a baseball in our hand, and pet our dog, but what can one do with a norm, an organizational structure, or a social system? Can you take a picture of racism, hold in your hand an hypothesis, or stroke a mores? Sociology is not about individuals or chemicals or physical objects but about organizations, systems, structures, processes and relationships. It studies power, conflict, roles and

values. Everyone may know that society is real, that they live in an existing community, and they have friends and relatives, but no one, including sociologists, can take pictures of them. Relationships and interrelated structures are grasped only in abstraction. And this grasp is perhaps most difficult at the beginning of study--at the introductory level. This is the level that introduces and has the most to do with sociology's basic and highly abstract concepts. Grasping becomes easier as it is linked to a related field (like social psychology or even anthropology) or to the study of a specific social institution or practice (like the sociology of education, sport, family, race, medicine, gender, and so forth).

It could be argued that this is true of all disciplines and that every subject matter deals with abstractions, concepts, and theories. In the social sciences in particular, do not psychologists deal with the mind, economists with inflation rates and political scientists with legislative processes, each of which are abstract notions? In a sense they do, as sociologists study and teach these aspects of society as well. But a case could be made for appreciating the importance of these disciplines as having a more direct personal impact on our lives and behaviors. That is, the mind is a highly personal matter, inflation rate changes become evident when shopping for groceries, and legislative processes include the election of politicians to represent us and who pass laws that effect the speed we drive and the taxes we pay. Areas of concern that are both concrete and personal legitimize them as areas of study and increase their importance

3. Sociologist's lack of Unity of Perspective

Third, sociology is different in its lack of unity of perspective within the field. Nearly every introductory textbook in sociology stresses multiple sources of information, a range of methodological tools and devices to analyze that information, and, of course, a range of theories, often contrasting ones, to explain what was found. To sociologists, how excellent that sociology has multi-paradigms, analyzes social phenomena at both macro and micro levels, and studies theories some of which assume order and stability and others that assume conflict and change. And how exciting for instructors to develop within students an eclectic and tolerant theoretical outlook. For students, however (and nonstudents as well), multi-paradigms may mean that your guess is a good as mine, no one has the "correct" answer, and if sociologists don't know and can't agree, how am I supposed to know, believe, or behave.

One example of this point appeared in a newspaper column written by Edwin Yoder (May 5, 1989, p. 15A). The column was titled "Shallow Sociobabble" and was an attempt to explain an assault in Central Park where a gang of teenage boys beat and raped a woman and left her for dead. The writer states that to watch the armchair sociologists struggle with this one is to see again the shallowness of sociobabble. Was it a class grudge they ask? The young victim was well-educated and an investment banker, though these facts were not emblazoned on the jogging shirt with which they bound her. Race? She was white, they black or hispanic. Poverty or deprivation? They lived on the edge of Harlem. The

anomie or alienation of modern city life? While the writer stated that none of these factors is to be dismissed as a possible precipitant of the evil acts, none explains them or ever can or will. Interestingly, to this writer at least, Mr. Yoder calls upon a theological explanation by stating that:

> We are all of a mixed nature and have the ingrained capacity to do evil (call it original sin or psychosis, or whatever you like) but always the freedom to choose instead to do good. That capacity to do evil may be sharpened, as it doubtless was the other night in New York, by the herd instinct... In the face of extremes of good and evil, we prefer sociobabble and the comic pretensions and superstitions of modern paganism. True there are things about the theological view of life and behavior that are hard to believe, and no one ever claimed it was easy. But compared with the sociological outlook on human nature, it is right as rain.

While this theological perspective may be "right as rain" it also fails the very tests used in producing "shallow sociobabble". These are tests of being testable, measurable, and replicable. Is predictability possible--even in probability terms? And does it leave open doors for alternative explanations?

For Mr. Yoder and for many students, an eclectic and tolerant outlook implies a lack of conviction, not a problem with theological explanations, and a lack of rigor not prevalent in other courses. In history, is their ambiguity over the beginning and ending of World War I? In chemistry, do multi-paradigms exist to explain what happens when hydrogen is combined with oxygen? In Latin, Russian or French, are their not rules that are precise, consistent and knowable? Contrast these "clear, simple, and factual matters" with the range of answers sociologists have to explain poverty, riots, rapes, or cult indoctrination and it is of

little wonder that students and the public believe that "that's your opinion", or that human behavior is "personal, unique and unpredictable". Yes, perhaps sociology is different.

4. Sociology's Ideological Content

Fourth, sociology is different in the ideological content of its knowledge. While on the one hand sociological data is information that carries no ethical, legal or political meaning, on the other hand sociological analysis is frequently laden with an ethical, legal or political stance. This political stance leans more to the left or liberal than to the right or conservative. As stated by Mills, apart from the theories of Spencer, Gumplovitz, Ratzenhofer and occasional other nineteenth-century social philosophers, the thrust of sociology has been decidedly melioristic, anti-Spencerian, and anti-laissez-faire (Mills 1966, p.447). In terms more easily understood, this means that sociologists, for the most part, have leaned toward improving social conditions and toward getting involved in social issues and reform movements. And perhaps they are even more inclined to exhibite a greater tolerance for societies noncomformists: the poor, minorities, cohabitors, unwed parents, gays, pacifists, feminists, student protestors, labor activists, and perhaps even other sociologists.

Data suggests that much of sociological instruction is politicized as well. John Brouillette has documented the liberalizing effect of taking Introductory Sociology, an effect not found among his control group of students taking an Introductory Economics course (Brouillette 1985). He states that the reason for

the difference is the fact that sociology, but not economics, challenges the dominant social ideology that students bring with them into the classroom. Four components of that ideology include: 1) the primacy of the individual, 2) the inherent legitimacy of formal or official structures and norms, 3) that reality exists independent of or outside the individual, and 4) that the American ways of doing things are the most natural and best (p. 141).

Perhaps the politicalization of instruction should not be entirely surprising. Can you imagine a course in stratification that does not highlight the magnitude of differential wealth, power and prestige among the classes? Can teachers be nonideological in teaching that in 1989, the minimum wage of $3.35 an hour in the U.S., affecting about seven million workers, is equal to less than $7,000 a year, a figure $5,000 dollars below the poverty threshold for a family of four; that today in our nation of wealth about 33 million persons are below the official government poverty level; or that a study commissioned by the U.S. Congress in 1983 found that the top 0.5 percent of families in the United States own over 35 percent of the net wealth of this nation and 45 percent if equity in personal residence is excluded from consideration (U.S. Congress 1986)?

Is it nonideological to teach ideas basic to conflict theory that suggest our educational system is used by the elite to maintain their social position, that the rules, norms and tests that promote competition are those based on middle-class norms that many working-class ethnics and inner-city blacks do not experience in their daily lives, and that the credentials, diplomas and

degrees given by schools represent learning that is not essential to doing most jobs (Eshleman 1986, p.118). How many teachers are free to teach ideas that raise basic questions about the very values and systems our schools are taught to promote?

Bonacich states that ideas such as these and others such as "Capitalism depends on Inequality" and that "the accumulation of vast amounts of wealth depends upon the exploitation of the poor" are too subversive, too completely undermining of the "American Way". Liberals, Conservatives, Democrats and Republicans are all committed to the idea of inequality and so, no matter how much they yell at each other in congressional hearings, behind the scenes they shake hands and agree that things are basically fine and as they should be (Bonacich 1989, p.88).

Given the content of the discipline, and in spite of the existence of many conservative sociologists, the ideological bent may well be impossible to avoid. To question the existing social order and to analyze differential behavior patterns is to highlight inequalities and injustices. It may be impossible to study our criminal justice system without noting the differential sentencing procedures and thus raise questions about the justice of the system. It may be impossible to study race relations and overlook the historical and contemporary patterns of prejudice and discrimination in jobs, income and housing and remain neutral or unconcerned about fair practices. Similar results are likely in studying, gender, health care, ethnic relations, or most substantive issues in sociology. These studies may be unsettling and to holders of conservative, traditional, and status quo

orientations, may take on an anti-American tone even when not intended as such.

Given the questioning nature of sociology with the consequence of producing many disturbing (i.e. left or liberal) findings and perspectives, sociology as a discipline in the school curriculum has been greatly affected by political changes in our society. The decades of the great society, of an international peace corp, of a war on poverty, and of asking what you can do for your country has shifted to a decade of proudness to be an American, personal happiness and job security, and a dramatic resurgence of fundamentalist religions. In the 1960s, sociology enrollments exceeded classroom capacities at most universities and majors reached historic highs. Today, few students find difficulty getting into sociology classes, the number of majors has declined, and the administrations in some universities, including my own, have made efforts to eliminate entire departments of sociology. This effort has apparently been successful at Washington University in St. Louis where on April 11, 1989 the Dean of Arts and Sciences announced his decision to close the Department of Sociology, recently a Ph.D granting department with 25 faculty.

These changes and yes the multiple and eclectic explanations as to what brought them about, have more than an academic disciplinary interest. What does it mean to the citizen committed to social change and the improvement of social conditions? What does it mean to blacks, women, gays, unwed mothers, blue-collar workers, the homeless, and others who seek equal opportunity and

treatment? And what does it mean or suggest about sociology as a school subject?

Can sociology and the social sciences be simultaneously trivial, useless, unscientific, dangerous, and threatening? Should sociology maintain as low a profile as possible and/or attempt to be noncontroversial and respectable to avoid attacks from and curry religious and political (meaning budgetary) support? And should this discipline which produces no new invention or provides no special service, which is highly conceptual and abstract, which lacks a unity of perspective, and which leans ideologically to the left, find a place in the precollege curriculum? The answer to this question, in true sociological fashion, has multiple perspectives and routes to consider.

ROUTES TO SOCIOLOGY AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT

There are a range of routes that have been and can be taken in dealing with sociology as a school subject. Permit me to express these in an "ideal type" framework by setting up a hypothetical construct of polar extremes. This construct permits any school or community to select from the continuum many possibilities from a wide range of sociological subject matters and methods appropriate to their situation. In simplified terms, this continuum of sociology as a school subject has as it's polar extremes "all" and "nothing". I will start with the "nothing" extreme first.

Ignoring Sociology

One polar extreme, and perhaps one common to many secondary schools as we face the 1990s, may be to ignore sociology as a

legitimate area for study. This extreme simply does not give consideration to sociology as a school subject. The role of sociology is nonexistent, that is, nothing. If sociology is seen as irrelevant and irreverent, this is an easy approach to take and will find widespread acceptance in politically conservative and fundamentally religious communities.

This approach is basic to the maintenance of the status quo and to not questioning the legitimacy of the existing social order. This approach supports the contention that since we live in a social world, we already know about our own behavior and to continue to study the obvious is a waste of time and money. This approach fits in nicely with concerns over an already overcrowded curriculum or the lack of qualified teachers. This approach will not produce radical students, rouse the passions or even produce feelings of disquiet. This approach does not interfere with the "hidden curriculum" of the schools; that set of unarticulated values, attitudes, and behaviors deemed proper by society: patriotism, obedience to rules, responsibility, conscientiousness, reliability, self control, punctuality, efficiency, and so forth.

This approach however, from my value orientation, is not a realistic one to take for it is totally inconsistent with fundamental tasks and goals of education such as transmitting knowledge, behaviors, skills, ideas, and discoveries. It suppresses inquiry, questioning, and a look at alternatives. This approach does not set us apart from the animal world who, it appears, are not concept-bearing agents, do not know or care as to what they are doing or why, and have no art, music, history,

science, or, in short, no culture. This approach fails to challenge the view that what seems obvious, or what everyone knows, may not be obvious at all and might actually be wrong.

As so well stated by Berger,

> It can be said that the first wisdom of sociology is this--things are not what they seem...Social reality turns out to have many layers of meaning. The discovery of each new layer changes the perception of the whole (1963, p. 23).

The mundane and familiar social world never seems the same again to anyone who has read Goffman (1959,1967) and texts exist that focus on sociology and everyday life (see: Karp and Yoels 1986). The obvious is often quite oblivious and our behaviors have consequences that we neither foresee or intend.

Sociology as Scientific, Independent and Unique

An opposite polar extreme in dealing with sociology as a school subject is to view sociology as a scientific discipline, independent and unique in it's own right, and oriented to the discovery of basic knowledge with little regard to its linkage with other areas of study, with little attention devoted to how to teach or transmit this knowledge to others, or with minimal concern as to the usefulness to the world it studies. This extreme focuses on sociology as a science, knowledge as specialized and particularized, and knowing for the sake of knowing. Perhaps this was the most common perspective found in many colleges and universities over the past half century. This is a view that is consistent with that of Parsons as stated earlier in this paper, that sociology is a scientific discipline primarily dedicated to the advancement and transmission of knowledge.

This perspective, as with the opposite one, is not, from my value orientation, a realistic stance for precollege sociology as a school subject. The discipline and profession of sociology involves far more than knowledge discovery per se. The discovery of knowledge and the understanding of society extends beyond the boundaries of any single discipline. A basic and widely accepted proposition within sociology itself is that the social world is comprised of many interrelated parts, levels of analysis, and theoretical perspectives including those derived from psychology, anthropology, biology, and other components of the ecosystem. This argument, while recognizing that sociology is unique and different, fails to stress how sociology can and does make a difference: in the personal lives of students, in their understanding of society, in their professional skills, and in their relationships with others.

Sociology must, it seems, become relevant to students and stress "the sociological imagination". Schools, through sociological training, can teach research and data analysis skills, can help students to think critically about the social world and their place within it, and can help assist in the development of problem-solving skills at both personal and organizational levels. Sociology, with the help of other disciplines, can initiate a renewed teaching movement and emphasize the teaching and application of knowledge in addition to its discovery. If these things can not be done by ignoring sociology as a legitimate area of study and are not likely to be done by viewing sociology

strictly as a scientific discipline oriented to the discovery of knowledge, how can they be accomplished?

Alternatives to sociology as a School Subject

The range of alternatives to dealing with sociology as a school subject fall between the two extremes described. These alternatives or approaches, numbering as many as creative minds can consider, range from independent courses in sociology with a focus on concerns and issues relevant to the lives of the students involved, to attempts at integrating sociological units or modules into existing courses already in the school curriculum. The independent courses may vary in content and methods from one teacher or school system to another as may specific modules or units be selected that are appropriate to the interests, skills and values of the teachers or communities.

Independent courses or specialized episodes, units, or modules addressing relevant concerns and issues need not focus on "problems" in the traditional sense of some social evil to be eradicated, but rather focus on "real" concerns and problems that link persons to the world in which they live. Examples include the study of gender relationships, jobs and the world of work, family life styles and intergenerational linkages, processes of socialization, health care and alternative social delivery systems, ways of knowing, studying and understanding the social world including specific methodological and research skills, deviant behaviors and means of control, inequality in the community and nation by wealth or class, the impact of masses, publics and public opinion in our daily lives, population changes in our communities

due to births, deaths and migration, or a look at the local school system: how it is structured, who holds the power and makes the decisions, who attends and/or drops out, what is taught, and so forth.

As indicated, sociology at the introductory level, due to its conceptual and abstract nature, is difficult to teach. Thus, particularly but not exclusively at the precollege level, sociological ideas and findings can be more readily understood if linked to personal, community, or substantive concerns, or perhaps with greater difficulty, linked or integrated into existing courses in the school curriculum: english, history, geography and so forth.

This latter approach may, however, simply involve wishful thinking. For one, most teachers are trained in elementary or secondary education with concentrations in specific fields such as history, english, or biology with little or no training in sociology. Can we expect persons from any discipline to integrate the concepts, theories, methods and findings from another discipline in which they are not trained? And second, perhaps the existing social studies curriculum is not equipped substantively or ideologically to accept or include sociology. If it is still true that every era in the history of social studies education in the United States in this century has been dominated by a 1916 model which is traditional, basically conservative, narrative, expository, history-as-the-core approach (Haas 1977, p. 52), than sociology, in light of the nature of the discipline as described in this paper, has little chance of inclusion.

The former approach of linking sociological content to substantive concerns may have far greater chances of success but again with extreme difficulty without a restructuring of the social studies curriculum. Peter Drucker argues that schools must change, for nothing in our educational systems at present prepares us for the reality in which we will live and work. In his words,

> no educational system tries to equip students with the elementary skills of effectiveness as members of an organization. These include: the ability to present ideas orally and in writing, briefly, simply, clearly; the ability to work with people; the capacity to shape and direct one's own work, contribution and career by making an organization a tool for the realization of ones aspirations and values. What's more, our schools have not yet begun to produce students who are technologically literate--in the broad sense of <u>having some understanding of the way the world around us functions</u> (Emphasis mine. Drucker 1989, p.19).

To me, Drucker's message mandates the greater inclusion of sociology into the school curriculum. Various efforts in this regard have been made over the past several decades including a major project by the American Sociological Association that was funded by the National Science Foundation from 1964 through 1971. This project, Sociological Resources for the Social Studies, (SRSS), included the development of a model one-semester sociology course, <u>Inquiries in Sociology</u>, thirty short units called <u>episodes</u>, and the development of six paperback books as supplementary reading materials. These activities, documented in various publications (Angell 1981; Haley 1972; Switzer 1986), serve as one model of producing a range of sociological materials with inquiry-type activities involving students directly in the learning process.

In spite of the limited impact of this major project, I would argue for continuing efforts of this type. It is likely the

limited impact had less to do with the quality of the materials produced than with the teacher training in the content and teaching strategies proposed, the support granted them by school systems, continuing funding sources, carefully formulated dissemination plans, and perhaps most importantly, the perception of sociology as a discipline that produces little, is highly abstract, lacks a unity of perspective and leans ideologically to the left.

In light of the existing educational and political structures, sociology as a school subject faces major challenges. Perhaps the greatest strides can be made in continuing efforts to show the relevance of sociology in the lives of students and the shifts in the discipline as it moves toward a greater emphasis on application (see: Freeman et. al. 1983; Eshleman 1986). My position is that the route toward sociology as a school subject in the 1990s needs to focus on considerations of alternative paths that lie between the extremes of ignoring the subject on the one hand and presenting it as a scientific discipline oriented solely to the discovery of knowledge with little personal or social application. My biases tell me that somehow we need to increase within students a greater understanding of social life and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. And this is what sociology is all about.

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